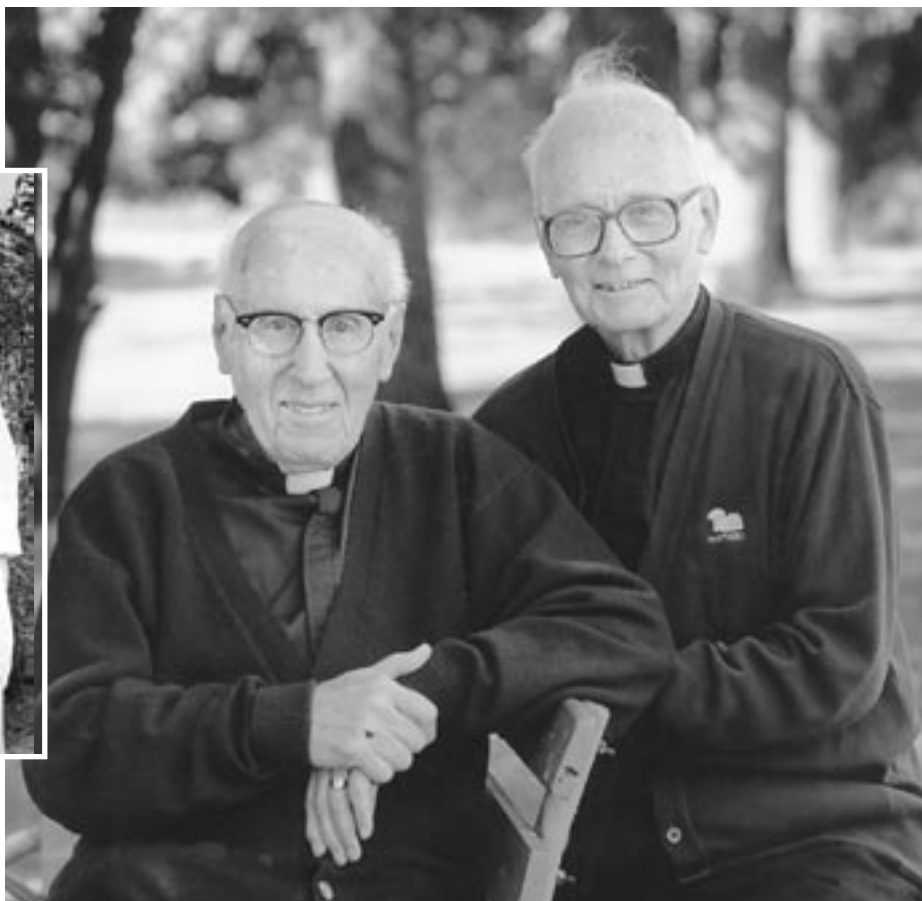




Brothers Bob and Joe Willmes, SJ (back row), with brothers Jacob and Ignatius Vellaringatt, SJ, in 1972 in Palai, India.



“We had a very loving and caring mother and father who showed us how to live good lives. Parents play an essential role in the lives of Jesuits by providing a solid foundation for the Faith and a deep concern and love for all,” says Joe Willmes, SJ (right), of the way he and his brother, Bob, were raised.

Brothers United by their Divide

by George Kearney

At the end of the game when the dust has settled and the team has parted ways until the next day, the brothers remain together walking home in the dusk, to their seats at the dinner table, to the bedroom they share, the bathroom, the clothes. They share everything, their lives are nearly one. This fraternal ideal seems to have been the norm for Bob and Jack Beckman, two brothers growing

up together and attending Jesuits schools in Cincinnati in the 1930's and 40's.

“Jack has always been my big brother. He was always older, could always do more, always knew more, could run faster, could hit the ball farther, knew what to do and how to do it, had all the answers, could answer all my questions, and was completely reliable and trustworthy,” says Bob of his brother Jack, who is older by two years. “I





"I felt accepted, respected, and cared for by him, which inspired in me a sense of trust and confidence, of sharing and give-and-take," says Bob Beckman, SJ (left), of his relationship with his brother, Jack.

also felt accepted, respected, and cared for by him, which inspired in me a sense of trust and confidence, of sharing and give-and-take. We had a strong relationship, for which I am eternally grateful."

Vince Beckman, the eldest of the Beckman children echoes the same sentiments. "We were a family built of strong relationships. In truth we were all blessed to have such a wonderful family."

The Beckman brothers took care of one another, admired one another, and were, above all, close friends. As children they shared nearly everything. As adults, they shared convictions, values, a desire to serve, and a vocation. As life unfolded, it was Bob and Jack's vocations as Jesuits that separated them, assigning Jack in Cincinnati, close to the family, while sending Bob to Peru. In this issue of *Partners*, family ties in the Jesuits are highlighted, and this story features the Beckmans and the Willmeses, two sets of brothers who maintained close ties for years and years while serving on different continents and in very different missions.

"The refrain of my youth," Bob Beckman recollects, "was, 'the family that plays together and prays together, stays together,' and that was certainly true in our case. We always did both play and pray together. God and prayer, work and study, fun and games, tears and cheers, sharing and caring, responsibility and honesty, were all part and parcel of our daily family life together."

We've always been very close, and we've always remained close, even when we haven't been near each other geographically," says Vince Beckman of his relationship with his two Jesuit brothers, Bob (left) and Jack.

So for these two brothers who had entered the Society within six months of one another, the news that Bob would be leaving for his new mission in Perú was difficult to hear. Bob admits that during his journey to Peru he felt “a deep sense of loneliness, accompanied by the gift of tears.” He adds, though, that he also felt “what must have been the grace of God filling me with the desire to follow his call with enthusiasm and eagerness.”

The grace of God has obviously remained with both brothers. Despite, as Jack says, “most definitely missing one another,” they’ve not only remained close, but grown closer since they’ve been separated.

Jack and Bob have combined for nearly 120 years of service to the Church. Jack has worked as director of the Milford Retreat House, minister of the novitiate house at Milford, principal of St. Xavier High School, and Assistant Dean and Director of Admissions at Loyola University Chicago, before undertaking his current work as a chaplain for alumni at St. X High School and a local hospital. Bob was assistant principal for a few years at St. Ignatius College Prep in Chicago before being assigned to Colegio San José in Arequipa, Perú, where he served as principal before establishing the Center of Ignatian Spirituality in Lima, Perú. He was also called back to serve as rector of the Jesuit community at Xavier University during the 80s and then returned to his current position as Director of the Center for Ignatian Spirituality in Lima.

“We’ve communicated regularly by air-mail forms and now by e-mail,” Jack says. “We close our letters with the remark, ‘meet you at the altar,’ and we do each and every day. It is our bond of unity and love.” They have met infrequently in their time as Jesuits, but Jack says they are so close that regular gatherings, while deeply appreciated, aren’t really necessary.

“The respect, admiration, and support our family has given, and continues to give, has sustained us,” Jack says.

Provincial Welcomes International Visitor



Archbishop Aloysius G. Jin, SJ, of Shanghai, visited the Chicago Province this past April. He was welcomed by Provincial Richard J. Baumann, SJ. Fr. Jin spoke to Loyola University’s Jesuit Community about the Church in China and his 27 years in captivity.

“This was love in action, and still is.” A love, it seems that can’t be separated by time or place.

The relationship between Bob Willmes and his younger brother, Joe, was very similar to that of the Beckmans. Nothing seems to capture the story better than a pair of journal entries made by Bob in February, 2000. On Sunday, February 20, Bob, who was then living at Colombiere Health Care Center in Clarkston, MI, laments the fact that he is losing his independence. He cites his inability to get up from a chair, or to take care of himself, which is compounded by a fear of falling and nervousness about his weakening legs.

On Monday, February 21, Bob begins his journal entry with the words “GREAT NEWS! Phone call from Joe at 7:30 P.M. our time. He and Ed Daly are flying from India on May 1, with first stop in Detroit. They will visit me then.” The smile that must have graced Bob’s face is evident in the words scrawled carefully in his journal, and in his constant respect and admiration for his younger brother Joe, who in 1949 was assigned to the Jesuit mission in India.

In 1952, Fr. Joe was assigned to the boarding school at St. Xavier in Jaipur, India. He continues his work there today, and over the past fifty years he has served the school as director, rector, treasurer, assistant headmaster, minister, and teacher. During this time, Fr. Joe’s older brother, Bob, was assigned to a variety of positions, that included Regent of Loyola University Dental School, Rector of Loyola University and Academy, Director of the Chicago Province Mission Office and Director of the Jesuit International Mission Office.

Fr. Joe says his family played a vital role in his decision to become a Jesuit. “We had a very loving and caring mother and father who showed us how to live good lives.” He also believes “parents play an essential role in the lives of Jesuits by providing a solid foundation for the Faith and a deep concern and love for all.” But it was Bob’s decision to enter the Jesuits, and his life as a religious, that really inspired Joe to join the Jesuits. “I was influenced by my brother’s example and obvious peace and joy in his new vocation.”

Soon after becoming a Jesuit, Joe found himself assigned to India and separated from the older brother who had led the way at St. Xavier High School and Xavier University, and the brother who had inspired him to a religious life. The Willmes brothers had always gotten along quite well, and Joe’s assignment to India didn’t change that. From the time he left, until Bob’s death earlier this year (see pg. 41 for obituary), they faithfully and regularly exchanged letters.

Their commitment to follow their parents’ example by trying to live good lives had landed them on separate continents, and helped them, despite the distance, sustain a close fraternal friendship. ■

